

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE DXCC COUNTRIES CRITERIA

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A Brief Introduction to the DXCC Countries Criteria

Most if not every article on DXing makes a very basic, very fundamental assumption: DXers chase countries. Indeed, it is the never-ending hunt for countries that has made DX what it is today. That should be self-evident: can anyone really imagine sane human beings living in a tent pitched beside guano mounds on the Penguin Islands because they enjoy the view? But many DXers do just that - they visit inhospitable, unsanitary dung heaps and rock piles throughout the world solely for the purpose of giving the Deserving another New One.

Why do they do it? The interesting subject of "why" shall be left for others to ponder - perhaps there is a reputation to be made for the psychologist who unlocks even more of the Eternal Truths of DXing. (Be careful when talking with that person in a white coat sitting next to you at your next DX club meeting!) But in this paper we'll restrict our attention to some really basic subjects: Just what is a DXCC country? How does a DXCC country get that way in the first place? How does one go about finding a new DXCC country and getting it added to the DXCC countries list?

What's a DXCC Country?

In one sense an answer to the question "what's a DXCC country?" is ridiculously easy to give: A DXCC country is any entity appearing on the DXCC countries list for which DXCC credit is given. Of course, although it's awfully hard to challenge the truth of such a statement, it really doesn't tell us much. In order to get a good understanding of what DXCC countries are all about, it's necessary to look at the DXCC rules.

The DXCC country didn't spring into life as a fully developed creature. After worldwide DX became a reality in the 1920s, a demand grew for a standard, reasonable method for scoring DX successes. The Worked All Continents award was created, but as long-haul DX became more commonplace, WAC was not enough. Discussions of "scores" turned to discussions of "countries," and

these discussions inevitably turned toward a standard, a standard list of countries.

In the early 1930s several attempts were made to define a standard country list, none of which managed to attract much of a following. Then Clinton B. DeSoto, W1CBD, took his turn at bat. Most DXers probably know DeSoto through his authorship of *200 Meters and Down*. But it was DeSoto, in *QST* for October 1935, who set the stage for the DXCC program. He stated a rule, unique in its simplicity:

Each discrete geographical or political entity is considered to be a country.

That's it! For some spot of land to be considered a DXCC country, it must be somehow discrete, distinct, separate from other DXCC countries. The distinctiveness may be geographical, political, or both.

The approach made sense - good sense. After a year of debate, the ARRL DX countries list was announced in January 1937, followed by the announcement of the DX Century Club in September of the same year. DXCC was on its way!

To be sure, there was a certain ambiguity to the basic rule. How "discrete" must a speck of land or a political entity be to be considered a country? DXers back in those days must have been a more passive lot than they are today, for although minor changes were made to that first 1937 country list as time passed, it was done quietly, handled in a gentlemanly manner - so civilized!

The years have brought change to the criteria. Compare Clinton B. DeSoto's immortal words with the latest and greatest version, published in the April 1988 issue of *QST*. The original modest, one sentence statement of principle has now grown to 1010 words of countries criteria, plus 412 more words of deletion criteria, altogether filling a full page of microscopic type. But the 1988 criteria boil down to the same meaning and intent of DeSoto's 1935 definition - only more detail has been added to help answer those eternal questions such as how *much* political difference is required, and how *much* distance is required.

The DXCC Countries Criteria

Section II of the DXCC Rules contains criteria against which candidates for DXCC country status must be tested. The criteria consist of three "points." Each of the three describes conditions which a geographical or political entity must satisfy in order to be added to the DXCC countries list. The entity doesn't have to satisfy all three to be granted country standing - only one is enough. There is also a fourth point which lists ineligible areas - areas or entities which by their very nature can't be given separate DXCC country status.

Whenever there are rules, there must be some way to change them, interpret them, and enforce them. In the case of the DXCC program two committees have such responsibilities - the ARRL DX Advisory Committee (DXAC) and the ARRL Awards Committee. We'll spend some more time later in this paper discussing the DXAC and the ARRL Awards Committee. For the time being just keep in mind the fact that these groups of people exist.

The points of the criteria are written in the same spirit as W1CBD's one-liner. Point 1 concerns governments - it tells how much political independence is required for DXCC country status. Point 2 treats geographical separation of islands from their controlling government by water, while Point 3 covers the case of geographical separation by foreign land.

We'll look at these points briefly, in just enough detail to give you a feeling for their meaning and intent and to point out some of their strengths and weaknesses.

Point 1, Government

Point 1 is the longest of the three - lots of detail to make the decision making process as simple as possible. At least in theory the process is simple! The first sentence itself is a looong one, reading

An independent country or nation-state having *sovereignty*, (that is, a body politic or society united together, occupying a definite territory and having a definite population, politically organized and controlled under one exclusive regime, and engaging in foreign relations - including the capacity to carry out obligations of international law and applicable

international agreements) constitutes a separate DXCC country by reason of **Government**.

Not a bad sentence, even though it's as long as a freight train. Most people can recognize a "real" country when it stares them in the face - these are the countries you studied in school - Sweden and Switzerland, Australia and Albania, Iraq and Indonesia. The first sentence says, in effect, real countries count.

Point 1 doesn't stop with real countries, however. It broadens its definition of a Point 1 DXCC country in the second paragraph, which states, in part

Other entities which are not totally independent may also be considered for separate DXCC status by reason of Government. Included are Territories, Protectorates, Dependencies, Associated States and so on. Such an entity may delegate to another country or international organization a measure of its authority (such as the conduct of its foreign relations in whole or in part, or other functions such as customs, communications or diplomatic protection) *without* surrendering its sovereign status. DXCC country status for such an entity is individually considered, based on all the available facts in the particular case. In making a reasonable determination as to whether a sufficient degree of sovereignty exists for DXCC purposes, the following characteristics (list not necessarily all-inclusive) are taken into consideration:

There follows a list of characteristics which must be taken into consideration when judging if such entities qualify under Point 1. For example, if a Territory is a member of a specialized agency of the U.N., that counts in its favor, as does handling its own licensing and landing permits, regulation of foreign trade, and so on. However, in practice the level of independence required is very high, so it is *very* difficult for a Territory, Protectorate, Dependency or Associated State to qualify under Point 1 these days.

In summary, Point 1 is straightforward and easy to understand if dealing with "real" countries. Otherwise, beware!

What is Separate Administration?

In an earlier incarnation of the DXCC criteria Point 1 was much simpler than it is today. *QST* for July 1963 gave the following version of Point 1:

Government/Administration: An area by reason of Government or a distinctively separate administration constitutes a separate entity.

In those days the concept of a "distinctively separate administration" was quite different than the interpretation which eventually led to new countries such as Kingman Reef and Sable Island. The criteria and discussions were full of the notion that every land area throughout the world belonged to *some* independent nation. Further, land areas could be broken into two categories: 1) land administered as part of an independent nation, and 2) land *not* administered as part of an independent nation, even though *belonging* to one. Lands falling under category 1 were Point 1 countries because of Government, while lands falling under category 2 were also Point 1 countries, because of their distinctively separate administration.

Finally, Kingman Reef, administered by the U.S. Navy, and Sable Island, administered by the Dept. of Transport of Canada, were added to the DXCC list. Many DXers complained that the concept of separate administration was being pushed too far - differing administrative organizations within the very same government were being used to justify new countries. As a result of this concern, the separate administration clause was dropped from the criteria in 1979.

Separate administration is no longer part of the criteria. Still, those countries which were added to the list under the very liberal interpretation of separate administration are still DXCC countries. Kingman Reef and Sable Island may no longer satisfy any criteria, but they're still on the list due to popular demand - it seems that Old Timers don't like to see their country totals shrivel, while the newcomers want to have gobs of countries available so that their country totals will climb ever higher, ever faster.

Every once in a while some enterprising DXer will look at a map and discover that Pomegranate Island, belonging to the free and independent nation of Hyacinth, and resting two miles offshore, is under the control of the Hyacinth Department of Interior, while all

neighboring islands are part of the city of Hyacinthville. Voila! A new DXCC country by analogy: Kingman Reef counts, so should Pomegranate. Sorry, it doesn't work that way. Separate administration is OUT!

Detour: Point 0 Countries

There is no Point 0 in the DXCC countries criteria, but it's useful to introduce the concept of a Point 0 country. Since there is no Point 0 in the criteria, the definition of a Point 0 country is almost obvious - it's a DXCC country which satisfies no criteria. It's a "criterialess" country. A Point 0 country may have satisfied some criteria in the past - most have, in fact. There are a number of Point 0 countries on the list. Just how many is a matter of debate, but there certainly are some. Sable Island and Kingman Reef, two "separate administration" countries are Point 0. So are Scotland and Wales. European Russia and Asiatic Russia are part of the very same nation - the R.F.S.F.R. - and they share thousands of miles of border. One of them must be Point 0.

Many DXers wonder why Point 0 countries stay on the DXCC list. The answer was really given above when we first discussed Kingman Reef and Sable Island: they remain on the DXCC list because the vast majority of DXers want them there! If there were ever a powerful grass-roots movement to pull a certain country off the list, it would eventually disappear. That happened to Okino Tori-Shima a decade ago, but that's a story in itself.

Of course, countries *are* taken off the list from time to time. Occasionally a country will go through political or geographical changes - real world changes as opposed to DXCC rule changes. When political or geographical changes take place, the countries are sometimes dropped from the active list and become "deleted" countries. There are rules which must be followed when countries are considered for deletion. These rules will be discussed later in this paper.

Point 2, Separation by Water

Point 2 consists of two parts, Point 2(a) and Point 2(b); the wording follows. While reading them, keep in mind that the purpose of Point 2 is to set rules under which new DXCC countries are created from islands which are reasonably distant from their "parent." At the same time, it is written to make certain that *too* many won't be able to qualify. It sounds complicated at first, but we'll also cover them in plain language shortly.

An island or a group of islands which is part of a DXCC country established by reason of Government, Point 1, is considered as a separate DXCC country under the following conditions:

(a) The island or islands are situated off shore, geographically separated by a minimum of 225 miles of open water from a continent, another island or group of islands that make up any part of the "parent" DXCC country.

For any *additional* island or islands to qualify as an additional separate DXCC country or countries, such must qualify under Point 2(b)

(b) This point applies to the "second" island or island grouping geographically separated from the "first" DXCC country created under Point 2(a). For the second island or island grouping to qualify, at least a 500-mile separation of open water from the first is required, as well as meeting the 225-mile requirement of (a) from the "parent." For any subsequent island(s) to qualify, the 500-mile separation would again have to be met. This precludes, for example, using the 225-mile measurement *for each* of several islands from the parent country to make several DXCC countries.

To understand how Point 2 works, pick an island, any island. First, if it has any chance to make it as a separate DXCC country, it had better be included within an existing Point 1 country. If it isn't, save your time, for it won't count. In the past this rule has been applied most often to Point 1 countries consisting of continental land areas. However, it may also be applied to Point 1 countries consisting entirely of islands, such as the Republic of Fiji. This

subtlety was never obvious before the rules were rewritten in 1988. Once it was spelled out Rotuma Island and Conway Reef came on the air and were accepted as new DXCC countries.

Next, does any other island or islands belonging to the Point 1 country have separate country status under Point 2? If so, you can't use Point 2(a) at all - you must move on to Point 2(b).

Let's stay with 2(a) by assuming that no other islands have already been split away from the Point 1 country. Next, take a look around the island, in all directions. Does it have 225 statute miles (miles consisting of 5280 feet) of open, uninterrupted water between its shores and every speck of land belonging to the Point 1 parent? This is crucial! If there is *any* land belonging to the parent closer than 225 miles, which itself doesn't have 225 miles separation from the parent, the test fails. The test fails even if the land is only a tiny rock peeking out from the water.

If your island passes the test, congratulations! You may have uncovered a new DXCC country. The story isn't over because your claim still must be checked out by the DX Advisory Committee and the ARRL Awards Committee, as discussed later.

Now that you understand the explanation just given, Point 2(b) is easy. Once an island has been qualified under Point 2(a), the next one (or several) must be qualified under Point 2(b). In short, Point 2(b) says that the next island or islands must have 225 or more miles separation from the parent, just as required in 2(a), and must also have 500 miles separation from all other Point 2 countries already split off from the same parent. The 500 mile requirement is a tough one. It's designed to keep the numbers down, to keep Point 2 countries spread out, like in a pileup. We can break a Point 1 country into one or two or a few Point 2 countries - but not too many.

Point 2 does make sense, all in all, and it leads to an almost mechanical procedure when testing a group of islands. But it does have a problem of its own: if two or more islands seem to have possibilities for new country status, which should be tested first? It makes a difference and can create real confusion. The Republic of Kiribati, presently split into four DXCC countries (Western, Central, Eastern Kiribati and Banaba Island) is a classic example: Starting in the west and splitting to the east doesn't give the same answer as starting in the east and splitting to the west! Rules of thumb can and have been used to solve the order problem, but none of them have ever been written into the criteria and are therefore unofficial.

Point 3, Separation by Another DXCC Country

Point 3 allows an entity to be considered separate a DXCC country if it is separated from its parent by another, intervening DXCC country. Point 3, as Point 2, consists of two parts, 3(a) and 3(b). Point 3(a) concerns separation of "contiguous" land masses, while 3(b) treats separation of islands.

Let's first look at 3(a).

3(a) Contiguous land mass: Where a country, such as that covered by Point 1, is totally separated by an intervening DXCC country into two areas which are at least 75 miles apart, *two* DXCC countries result. This straight line measurement is made at the closest point, and may include inland lakes and seas (that are part of the country) in the measurement. International waters may be included in the separation but do not contribute to the 75-mile minimum.

The country which is being considered for a split under Point 3(a) must itself be a Point 1 country if Point 3 is to be applied. Point 2 countries of any kind need not apply. Next, the country must be separated into two pieces. Second, the separation must be complete - each and every line drawn from any point on the first part to any point on the second part must cross some land - real dirt, that is - of the intervening DXCC country. Third, there must be 75 statute miles of separation at the closest point.

Point 3(b) is similar to 3(a), except its application is restricted to separation of islands. No minimum separation is required. Here's how it reads:

3(b) Islands: Where two islands, of the government under Point 1, are totally separated by an intervening DXCC country (also under Point 1), *each* island counts as a separate DXCC country. No minimum distance is required. The test for total separation means that a straight line cannot be drawn from any point on one island to any point on the other island without passing through another DXCC country. This intervening country may be part of either island, another island, or part of a continent.

There is a big problem with Point 3(b) as written, a *really* big problem. A literal application of 3(b) might allow hundreds upon

hundreds of islands worldwide to qualify for DXCC country status! Countries such as Long Island, New York, the Isle of Wight in England, plus virtually every island in the Saint Lawrence Seaway. See if you can find the flaw!

Now, the RSGB's IOTA program is great - thousands of DXers throughout the world are having a grand time chasing islands! But few would like to see DXCC become a carbon copy of IOTA, least of all those dedicated DXers who were responsible for the 1988 rewrite. What happened? Reportedly, Point 3 was judged to be too long and complicated as the final draft of the 1988 criteria was being pulled together. Some words were cut to make it shorter, it was rushed off to the printer, and... You know the rest.

The DXAC discovered the flaw after the new criteria were published. Meanwhile, some enterprising DXers in the Seattle, Washington area also read Point 3(b) very carefully. New country status for Guemas Island, located in the Puget Sound, was requested and a DXpedition was announced so that all the Deserving would have a chance to work and confirm the New One.

Guemas Island didn't make the countries list, of course, but an awful lot of DXers had a grand time in the pileups, as did the Guemas operators. And isn't that part of what DXing is all about?

As this is being written in early 1991, the DXAC is still working on new wording for both Points 3(a) and 3(b). As long as it is known for certain that Point 3 will be changing, it makes little sense to discuss it in any more detail here. Perhaps this paper will be rewritten some day. If so, we can then take a longer stroll through the Point 3 garden.

Ineligible Areas

Point 4 of the criteria lists areas which are not eligible for consideration as DXCC countries. It includes unclaimed or unowned areas, Demilitarized Zones, Neutral Zones and Buffer Zones. An iron-clad, all-inclusive statement is also part of Point 4:

The following do not count as a separate DXCC country from the host country: Embassies, consulates and extra-territorial legal entities of any nature, including, but not limited to, monuments, offices of the United Nations agencies or related organizations, other inter-governmental organizations or diplomatic missions.

There has been a long-standing fear among DXers that the DXCC countries list would grow without bound if embassies and consulates were somehow able to achieve country status. In order to prevent this from happening, the above phrase was added to the criteria in 1986.

Deletion Criteria

Over the years many DXCC countries have been deleted from the active country list. This has occurred generally when some major political or geopolitical change has taken place, or when the realities of a political situation are finally recognized.

Deletion criteria first became part of the DXCC rules in 1988, when they were added in Section III. Deletions come in four flavors: Annexation, Unification, Partition, and Independence. DXers should realize that just because some political change has taken place, a deletion isn't automatically called for. Some stockbrokers have been known to "churn" their accounts, but the vast majority of DXers do not like to see churning on the DXCC list - deletions just for the sake of deletions. So countries are deleted only after careful study by the DX Advisory Committee and the ARRL Awards Committee.

DXCC countries can also be "un-deleted" or reinstated if a political change which caused a deletion in the first case is reversed. The most recent example is Western Sahara, which was deleted in 1978, then reinstated in 1988.

Accreditation Criteria

The accrediting of operations for DXCC credit is one of the most important and controversial aspects of the DXCC program. Accreditation criteria are given in the DXCC rules, and are recommended reading for anyone planning a DXpedition to a rare spot.

One question about accreditation is asked repeatedly:

"What business is it of the ARRL whether or not I am properly licensed?!?! The ARRL has no authority over my operation!!"

Yep, that's right. But there's another side to the story.

The ARRL knows only too well that the incentives provided by the DXCC program have caused well-intentioned DXers to cut corners. The ARRL also knows that some of those well-intentioned DXers, as a result of cutting corners, have damaged amateur radio in some parts of the world. Votes in favor of amateur radio at WARC conferences are precious. The ARRL doesn't want to jeopardize votes or amateur radio's standing in the international arena by even *appearing* to condone questionable operations. DXCC credits therefore will not be given for an operation which hasn't been properly authorized. So, although it may well be true that the ARRL has no authority over the operation, the ARRL *does* have control over which QSL cards are accepted for DXCC credits and will exercise that control if it is deemed to be in the best interests of amateur radio.

Tough words, but that's the way it is!

How DXCC Countries Are Born

How are DXCC Countries born? Well, their birth has nothing to do with flowers, pollen, or bees. It's much simpler. We'll spend some time going through the mechanics of creating a new DXCC country.

Any entity not already on the countries list which satisfies the DXCC criteria, as published in *QST* for April 1988, can become a new country. In order to make a new country happen, however, some person or group of persons must decide that it *should* happen - that the criteria are in fact satisfied. The groups with the responsibility for making the decision are the DX Advisory Committee and the ARRL Awards Committee, often referred to simply as the Awards Committee.

The DX Advisory Committee (DXAC) consists of sixteen members, one from each of the fifteen ARRL Divisions, plus one from the Canadian Radio Relay League. All sixteen members are experienced DXers and all are volunteers; they serve without pay. They communicate with one another by mail, although the telephone circuits are exercised quite a bit, too. Most mail is distributed by ARRL Headquarters. Do you want to mail sixteen letters with one postage stamp? Send a letter to the DXAC in care of ARRL Headquarters, and it will eventually be distributed to all sixteen members.

The ARRL Awards Committee is smaller than the DXAC. It is

made up of eight staff members at ARRL Headquarters in Newington, Connecticut. Two alternate committee members may be appointed. An alternate may serve whenever a primary member is not available. These persons, all members of DXCC and active in both DXing and contesting, make the final decisions on all matters related to ARRL contests and awards, including DXCC.

Liaison between the DXAC and ARRL Headquarters is handled by a staff person, while the interface between the DXAC and the Board of Directors is taken care of by a Board member. Another staffer is responsible for keeping correspondence flowing to and from the committee members.

Rules of procedure for the two committees have been developed over the years, in part as the result of Board Direction. For example, since March 1976, the DXAC *must* be consulted before any change in the DXCC countries list can be made; that is, the Awards Committee, made up of paid ARRL Headquarters employees, can't add a new country to the DXCC list, or even delete one, without prior agreement of the DXAC.

The process for handling a new DXCC country application works like this: Any time a request for new country status (more on this below) is received by League Headquarters, the request is forwarded to the DX Advisory Committee. The DXAC then has the responsibility for evaluating the merits of the request and making a recommendation to the Awards Committee. According to the rules of procedure, if the DXAC denies the request (no new country), then the Awards Committee takes no action. If the DXAC recommends approval, then the members of the Awards Committee study the question themselves, and then accept or reject the DXAC recommendation.

Does the Awards Committee ever reject a recommendation from the DXAC? Sure, it does happen, but not very often. Occasionally disagreements occur which are worked out after further discussion and an exchange of views between the two committees. More often than not, the DXAC's recommendations flow smoothly through the Awards Committee, without a ripple. Decisions made by the DXAC and the Awards Committee may be reviewed by the ARRL Executive Vice President, and sometimes even the ARRL Board of Directors gets involved, but vetoes are very rare.

How To Apply for a New DXCC Country

Only a very small number of the thousands upon thousands of DXers in the world ever activate a new DXCC country. Finding new countries is *tough*; all the easy ones have already been discovered and added to the countries list. But there are hard-working, enterprising DXers here and there who never seem to give up hope. They spend their evenings and weekends looking at maps and charts, bleary-eyed, searching for clues which might lead to something new, something different. Talk about military secrecy, it is nothing compared with the secrecy which surrounds the hunt for new countries. For a new country brings honor among DXers, and with so few New Ones to go around, clues are very carefully guarded. Successful country hunters realize that nothing - NOTHING - should ever be taken for granted. Things are not always as they seem at first glance - the ownership of an island, a distance measurement, a criteria interpretation.

The hunt goes on. Although only a few will ever win, it's a game anyone can play!

Suppose *you*, dear reader, discover an island which you know for *certain* should count as a New One. You've checked the maps, read a few history books, tested it against the criteria, and know beyond even the shadow of a doubt that you have a NEW ONE.

What do you do? First,

Read the latest DXCC criteria again! And again! And again!

Check your facts again! And again! And again!

Important stuff! Incredible amounts of time and energy have been wasted by those who simply hadn't read the criteria, or who made a mistake making a measurement on a chart! If you have trouble with certain points, then ask questions. Call your local DXAC member. If you have no local member, get the name of one and write a letter outlining your problem. Or talk it over with someone who has been through the drill before: there have been seven new countries announced in the past three years - Aruba, Western Sahara, M-V Island, Rotuma Island, Conway Reef, Banaba Island and Walvis Bay. The DXers who opened up those New Ones know the ropes. They can help.

If, after you've looked at your New One from all angles, you're

still convinced you're right, then

Put your thoughts on paper, and build your case.

The DXAC now has a standard form you may request which briefly describes what is expected in new country petitions. In your petition you should describe the entity you have in mind and tell how and why it satisfies the criteria. Include supporting evidence such as maps, encyclopedia articles, quotes from authorities, including letters from officials with responsibility in or over your New One. Put yourself in the shoes of a DXAC member and try to anticipate questions, problems, and doubts which might arise. Cover them in your writeup. Include everything relevant you can get your hands on! Organize the material in a way such that it flows smoothly and logically from beginning to end, building your case in clear, understandable terms. Next,

Mail your material to ARRL Headquarters with a note to distribute it to the DX Advisory Committee.

Headquarters will reproduce your petition and distribute copies to each member of the DX Advisory Committee.

You next step is perhaps the hardest of all, for now you must

Cross your fingers, lean back in a comfortable chair, and wait. Do not hold your breath!

The process takes time. After your petition has been reproduced and distributed to the DXAC, the committee members must read the petition, then read it again. Letters and phone calls start flowing between the members. Questions are asked and answers given. Claims are made, rebutted, and the rebuttals challenged. More information is sometimes required. The process takes months. Just when the committee seems to be settling down to a consensus, another significant question may surface, and the process starts all over again.

Does the process take too much time? Sure it does! But the DXAC is a careful gang, very careful. They take the DXCC program and their responsibility very seriously. Would you have it any other way?

In Conclusion

The author, for one, believes that the DXCC program is the very essence of worldwide DXing. The DXCC program has become over the years the most respected awards program of all. It has earned that respect in part by its unwavering insistence that the program be run according to the very highest ethical standards. The DXCC program has INTEGRITY. The results are manifold. The incentives provided by DXCC cause DXers worldwide to learn about propagation, to learn how to design and build better antennas, to improve their operating skills, all as part of the hunt for a New One. We have DXers worldwide cooperating with one another in friendship without regard to race, creed, color, nationality, or political persuasion. The DXCC program has helped create a true international community, working together toward common goals. I'm *proud* to be a DXer, aren't you?
